WAITING

by osamu dazai

translated by angus turvill

WAITING

by osamu dazai

translated by angus turvill

japanese literature
publishing + promotion center

English translation © Angus Turvill, 2007
Edited by Elizabeth Floyd
Cover design by Holly Esparrago
First published in Japanese under the title *Matsu* in 1942

Japanese Literature Publishing and Promotion Center
World Yotsuya Bldg 5F, 4-3-1 Yotsuya
Shinjuku, Tokyo 150-0004, Japan
j-lit@j-lit.or.jp

WAITING

Every day I go to the little station to meet someone. Who that someone is, I do not know.

I always go there on my way home from the market. I sit down on a cold bench, put my basket on my lap, and gaze over at the ticket gate. Each time a train arrives—an up-line train, a down-line train—passengers spew out of the carriage doors and throng towards the gate. With angry faces they show passes, hand over tickets. Then, eyes straight ahead, they walk hurriedly on. They come past my bench, go out into the open space in front of the station, then scatter in their various directions. I just sit there. What if someone should smile and talk to me? Oh no, please no! It makes me feel so nervous. Just the thought makes me shudder, as if cold water has been thrown over my back—I cannot breathe. But still I wait for someone, every day. Who can it be that I'm waiting for? What kind of person? But it may not be a person at all. I don't like people. Or rather, they frighten me. Face to face with someone, saying things I don't want to, like 'how are you?' or 'it's getting cold'—saying these things just for the sake of it. I hate it. It makes me feel I'm a liar, as if there's no bigger liar in the world. It makes me want to die. And the person I'm talking to, too wary of me, paying vague compliments, expounding opinions that they don't really have: I listen to them and I feel sad, sad at their mean-minded caution. It makes me dislike the world more and more—I can't stand it. Are people always like this—spending their whole lives tiring each other out with wary exchanges of stiff greetings? I don't like being with people. So except in very unusual circumstances, I have never done anything like go to visit friends. I always used to feel most comfortable at home, sewing quietly with my mother, just the two of us. But then the war started and things got so tense I felt I shouldn't be the only one to just sit at home every day. I felt uneasy. I couldn't relax at all. I felt I wanted to work as hard as I possibly could, to make a direct contribution. I lost confidence in the way I had been living.

I couldn't bear to sit mutely at home. But if I went out, where was there for me to go? So I do the shopping, and on my way back I go to the station

and sit there on the cold bench. I want that ‘somebody’ to come: ‘Oh, if they should suddenly appear! But I’m also afraid: ‘What if they come? What shall I do?’ At the same time I’m resolved, resigned: ‘If they come I shall dedicate my whole life to them. That moment will decide my fate.’ These feelings twist strangely together—these feelings and disgraceful fantasies. My heart aches: it’s overwhelming, almost suffocating. The world goes silent; the people going back and forth at the station look distant and tiny, as though I’m watching through the wrong end of a telescope. It feels unreal, as if I’m in a daydream, as if I’m not sure whether I’m alive or dead. Oh, what can it be that I’m waiting for? Perhaps I’m just a filthy whore. All that about the war and feeling uneasy, wanting to work as hard as I possibly could, wanting to make a contribution—perhaps it’s all a lie. Perhaps I was making a fine-sounding excuse, trying to find an opportunity to make my reckless fantasies come true. I sit here with this vacant look on my face, but deep inside I think I see a flicker, a flame of some outrageous intrigue.

Just who is it I’m waiting for? I have no clear idea at all—only a vague shadow in the mist of my mind. Yet I wait. Every day since the start of the war, on my way back from shopping I’ve come to the station, sat on this cold bench, and waited. What if someone should smile and talk to me? Oh no, please no! It’s not you I’m waiting for. So who is it, then? Who is it I’m waiting for? A husband? No. A lover? Certainly not. A friend? Oh no. Money? Ridiculous. A ghost? Oh, oh no!

Something more pleasant, bright and cheerful, something wonderful. I don’t know what. Something like spring. No, that’s not it. Fresh leaves. May. Cool, clear water flowing through fields of wheat. No, that isn’t it at all. Oh, but even so I wait, my heart throbbing. People stream past my eyes. It’s not this one. Not that one. My shopping basket in my arms, I quiver. I wait. With all my heart, I wait. I ask you, please, please do not forget me—the girl who comes every day to the station to meet you and then goes sadly home. Please, please remember me, and do not laugh at me. I am not going to tell you the name of the little station. I don’t have to: you will see me sometime, even if I don’t.